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Report of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau

Summary

In response to Economic and Social Council resolution 2005/32, in which the Council extended the mandate of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau, the present report provides an overview of current developments in the country, including of the overall economic and social situation. It also highlights the work of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group since its last report (E/2005/70), describes the current status of international donor support for the country and provides medium to long-term perspective on the situation in the country from the point of view of the Group. It makes some general conclusions and recommendations, including that Guinea-Bissau should continue to receive the sustained attention from the international community, including by the Peacebuilding Commission.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2005/32 of 18 July 2005, the Economic and Social Council decided to extend the mandate of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau until its substantive session of 2006. The present report describes the situation in Guinea-Bissau and provides highlights of the work of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group since its last report. The report also describes international donor support to Guinea-Bissau, provides a medium to long-term perspective of the challenges facing the country and draws conclusions and recommendations from the Group's unique perspective on how the international community can continue to provide support.

2. Since the Group's last report to the Council (E/2005/70), the second round of presidential elections was held on 24 July 2005. The elections marked the official end of the transitional phase, which began after the military intervention of 14 September 2003. Joao Bernardo (Nino) Viera, an independent candidate, who was previously the head of the ruling party, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC), won the election. The results were contested by Malam Bacai Sanha, the main presidential contender and candidate of PAIGC, who also requested that the Supreme Court annul the results of the elections. Subsequent to the ruling of the Supreme Court on 28 August 2005 that there was "insufficient judicial elements" to rule on the request of Mr. Sanha, the inauguration of the President-elect was held on 1 October 2005.

3. The period since the elections has been marked by political tensions among the various political parties and in the national Parliament as the limits of cohabitation became clear. These tensions increased after the new President dismissed the Government led by Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior on 28 October 2005 and appointed a new Prime Minister, Aristides Gomes. During the post-election impasse, regional engagement remained high. Efforts were made by the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union, President Pedro Rodrigues Pires of Cape Verde, and by the Chair of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPLP) President Fradique de Menezes of Sao Tome and Principe, to mediate the post-electoral impasse. These efforts were also supported by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in close cooperation with the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNOGBIS) and the United Nations country team.

4. Since mid-March 2006, developments have been dominated by the military action undertaken by the Government of Guinea-Bissau, beginning on 15 March 2006, on the eastern part of its border with Senegal against one of the factions of the Mouvement des forces démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC), which allegedly runs operations from Guinea-Bissau. According to the Government, these operations were launched for security reasons. As a result of the fighting, as many as 8,000 people have been internally displaced and a number of civilian and military deaths have occurred. The United Nations country team, supported by a number of civil society organizations, has responded quickly to this emerging humanitarian situation, within the limits of its resources, by mobilizing resources to feed and transport the displaced to safety. This unforeseen development is a major test of the capacity and resources of the Government, the small United Nations team in Guinea-Bissau and its supporters from the donor and non-governmental community.

5. On 24 March 2006, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Jan Egeland, expressed grave concern for the civilians displaced by the fighting. Concerns are also being raised that the fighting may cause a food crisis, as thousands of people have fled their homes and peasants have been prevented from reaching markets to sell their produce. In addition to causing the death of civilians, the laying of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines could prevent agricultural cultivation in the area. The situation has been further complicated by the fact that the fighting is occurring in the same region where the large cashew plantations are located and is taking place at a time when harvesting is about to begin. Because cashew is the principal export crop of the country and the principal source of revenue for the State, continuation of the fighting could lead to a further weakening of the economy and could affect the ability of the State to finance its budget.

6. The overall assessment of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group is that Guinea-Bissau continues to experience "growing pains" in consolidating gains in its post-conflict transition and needs the full engagement of both the regional and international communities. While there are continuing concerns about political and institutional instability, the Group welcomes the continued willingness of all parties in Guinea-Bissau to use legal and constitutional means to address their concerns. The Group also points to the efforts of the new Government to assure the donor community of its intention to continue the economic reforms as demonstrated by the retention of the Minister of Economy from the previous Government and the successful negotiation of a staff-monitored programme for 2006 with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The Group would like to draw the attention of the Economic and Social Council to the fact that the continuing inability of the Government to finance the minimum functioning of the State continues to generate insecurity and instability in the country.

II. Economic and social situation

7. As in the recent past, the economic and social situation in Guinea-Bissau continues to be difficult. The economic picture in Guinea-Bissau in 2005 did not change significantly compared to 2004, growing at an annual rate of 3.5 per cent in real terms, a rate that was barely sufficient to slow the worsening living conditions of the population, considering that according to estimates, the demographic growth rate ranges between 2 and 3 per cent. IMF reports, however, that success had been achieved in some areas: the rate of inflation was contained at 3.4 per cent in 2005; efforts were made to improve tax administration; and the overall budget deficit declined from 15 to 12 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP).[1]

8. Similarly, since the Group's last report in June 2005, the state of public revenues remains worrisome. Not unexpectedly, revenue collection decreased during the period, partly fuelled by the political impasse that left the domestic economy almost paralysed with no evidence of significant economic activity. During the second part of the year, the difficult financial situation was exacerbated by the cholera epidemic, which spread throughout the country.

[1] Based on IMF projections.

9. During the latter half of 2005, the Economic and Monetary Union of West African Countries covered part of the budget deficit of 26 million euros (€). The Government was forced to resort to funding recurrent costs through short-term loans at commercial rates from a local bank and from banks in neighbouring countries while waiting for budgetary support from the World Bank and the European Union. As at 15 April 2006, salaries had been only paid up to the end of January 2006.[2] In fact, as a result of wage disputes with the Government, a series of strikes by the national teachers union combined with health concerns arising out of the cholera epidemic, the beginning of the school year was delayed until December 2005. Strikes continued into 2006 by the demands of the national teachers union for unpaid salaries.

10. The Ad Hoc Advisory Group welcomes the untiring efforts of the United Nations country team in support of the Government of Guinea-Bissau, particularly in the areas of health and education, under difficult circumstances and with meagre resources. With support from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Government has organized free-of-charge child registration campaigns. In 2005 alone, more than 53,000 children under 10 benefited from this initiative, including street children, child workers, orphans and refugees. Routine vaccine coverage rates in 2005 reached 92 per cent for tuberculosis, 73 per cent for DPT3 (combined diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus vaccine), 57 per cent for measles and 33 per cent for tetanus. Positive results were recorded in the two rounds of national immunization against polio and vitamin A distribution, undertaken by the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF in collaboration with Rotary and Plan International. Coverage rate was 100 per cent of children under five.

11. The end of a cholera epidemic, which began in June 2005, was officially announced by the Ministry of Health on the first week of February 2006. The number of cases surpassed 25,000, the highest in the West African region, and the epidemic claimed over 430 lives. In order to ensure that preparedness measures are in place for potential future risks, surveillance actions remain in place.

12. The Government of Guinea-Bissau and the United Nations country team are concerned about the potential arrival of avian flu to the country, particularly in the face of its poor health and veterinarian infrastructure. The country team in Guinea-Bissau is providing assistance to the national authorities to devise and implement contingency preparedness measures.

13. The Group continues to be concerned about the lack of progress in the overall socio-economic picture of Guinea-Bissau. The Council may recall that when the Group was established in 2002, Guinea-Bissau ranked 167 out of 173 countries on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index. In 2005, it ranked 172 out of 177. As much as 60 per cent of the country's working force is unemployed and 65 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line on less than 2 United States dollars ($) per day. Approximately 44 per cent of the population has no access to safe drinking water, 36 per cent of the population is food insecure and 30 per cent of children under 5 years of age are malnourished.

[2] A total amount of 1.12 billion CFA francs has been recovered under the form of taxes, customs income and fishing licences, while expenditures reached 3.8 billion CFA francs on 31 January 2006.

14. It is not surprising that these difficult conditions continue to push the population of Guinea-Bissau to take desperate measures to reach Europe to find employment. In early March, 43 Guineans drowned trying to reach Spain.[3] The Group urges the Economic and Social Council to ensure that the policy recommendations to be adopted at its high-level segment on achieving productive employment and decent work and those recommendations addressed to young people, in particular, be implemented on an accelerated basis in countries emerging from conflict like Guinea-Bissau.

III. Highlights of the activities of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau

15. Recognizing that the post-electoral impasse had shaken the confidence of the donor community and affected the country's ability to mobilize resources for development, at the initiative of the Government of Guinea-Bissau, a meeting of the Advisory Group was held on 20 September 2005 on the margins of the 2005 World Summit. The meeting was co-chaired by Dumisani Kumalo, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Chairman of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea-Bissau of the Economic and Social Council, and Mousa Gibril Bala-Gaye, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Gambia, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Friends of Guinea-Bissau. Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior led the delegation of Guinea-Bissau, which also included the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of the Economy. In addition to the Guinea-Bissau delegation, a wide range of actors participated in the meeting, including the members of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group at the ministerial level (South Africa, Portugal and Guinea-Bissau), the members of the Friends of Guinea-Bissau, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Angola, Cape Verde, the Gambia, Guinea-Conakry, Senegal and Timor-Leste and Mohamed Chambas, Executive Secretary of ECOWAS. The United Nations system was also represented at senior level by representatives of the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, IMF, UNDP and the World Bank.

16. The meeting discussed the situation in Guinea-Bissau and how to mobilize the support of the international community. The partnership approach recommended by the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Guinea Bissau (see E/2003/8) was considered to be instrumental in the transition process. Participants also praised the efforts of the Government of Guinea-Bissau to promote sound governance, which was acknowledged by the IMF staff-monitored programme. The consensus of the meeting was that the international community should support Guinea-Bissau after a difficult transition process at the donor round-table conference, scheduled for November 2005, as well as through the transformation of the IMF staff-monitored programme into an emergence post-conflict assistance programme. The strong message of the meeting to the Government of Guinea-Bissau was that stability between various institutions and political parties was a prerequisite for donors to support the country.

17. At the meeting of the Group on 6 December 2005, the Group was briefed on the situation in the country by videoconference by the representative of the

[3] http://asia.news.yahoo.com/060307/afp/060307183703int.html.

Secretary-General in Guinea-Bissau and the United Nations resident coordinator on the situation in the country. Acknowledging that the political stalemate resulting from the dismissal of the Government had contributed to the delay in receipt of promised funds from the European Union, the World Bank and bilateral donors, the United Nations country team appealed for the support of the Group to help mobilize funds for the Emergency Economic Management Fund. The country team had recommended the extension of the Fund, which was scheduled to be terminated at the end of December 2005, to the end of 2006. In response, the Chairman of the Group wrote to the Member States and Observers of the Economic and Social Council alerting them to the fiscal crisis being faced by the Government and urging them to consider making a contribution to the Fund to help assist the Government in the payment of salaries and the provision of basic social services until the convening of the donor's round-table conference. The Group also urged Member States to consider making a contribution to the implementation of a $1.5 million portfolio of quick-impact projects at the community level as part of the United Nations country team's peacebuilding strategy for Guinea-Bissau. The Group also discussed a proposed visit to Guinea-Bissau but was unable to undertake it because of financial rules related to travel after the close of the budget cycle.

18. On 22 March 2006, the Group met to discuss the situation in the country. The Group was briefed by the Representative of the Secretary-General in Guinea-Bissau on the overall situation, including the military action undertaken by the Armed Forces of Guinea-Bissau along the border with Senegal and its implications for the economic and social situation of the country. The Group expressed concern that this development could have far-reaching consequences with the potential to deteriorate further and to destabilize the already tense situation in the subregion.

IV. International donor support to Guinea-Bissau

19. As the Group has noted in previous reports, international donor support continues to remain critical in helping the Government of Guinea-Bissau to meet its priorities, that is, the payment of salaries, including arrears, as well as the basic requirements for the functioning of government. In the long term, resources are required for investment in the economic and social infrastructure in order to put in place the conditions required by the country for sustainable development.

20. The positive developments reported in July 2005 have not borne fruit. The Council may recall that the Group had reported that the IMF staff-monitored programme negotiated in March 2005 could be transformed into an emergency post-conflict assistance programme after six months, depending on final decisions by the World Bank and the European Union on new budget support, a commitment to the continuation of policies adopted with the staff-monitored programme after the upcoming election and the holding of the donor round-table conference, originally scheduled for 8 December 2005.

21. The delay in the acceptance of the results of the second round of the Presidential elections and in the inauguration of the President along with the subsequent dismissal of the Government of Prime Minister Carlos Gomes Junior precipitated a cascade of further delays in actions required to mobilize resources for the State. The cancellation of article IV consultations by IMF following the dismissal of the Government of Carlos Gomes Junior on 28 October 2005 in turn led

to the suspension of the World Bank and European Union budget support and a continuation of the "wait and see" attitude of bilateral donors.

22. In responding to the lack of budgetary support, the Government of Guinea-Bissau has built up additional debt as it turned to short-term commercial loans to fund payment of civil service salaries. Complicating the debt picture is the fact that Guinea-Bissau is in arrears in its payments to most of its creditors.

23. Understanding the need to assure political and economic stability in Guinea-Bissau, a joint high-level delegation, including a technical team of the West African Economic and Monetary Union, the Central Bank of West African States, the West African Development Bank and ECOWAS undertook a mission to Guinea-Bissau in late February 2006 to explore possible financial and technical assistance to the country, including the payment of civil service salaries for the period from February to March 2006, the payment of salary arrears from 2000 to 2005 and the debt in the first trimester of 2006 to IMF and the World Bank.

24. The Council may recall that in its last report (E/2005/70), the Ad Hoc Advisory Group had noted that "the representatives of the African Development Bank, the Central Bank of West African States and the West African Economic and Monetary Union had stated that, despite their limited means, they were able to provide support for Guinea-Bissau in the context of a flexible interpretation of their financial rules ... and urged the international community not to subject Guinea-Bissau to the same conditionalities as other countries". The Group would like to support this approach in the context of the Government's current financial crisis.

25. The successful completion of article IV consultations at the end of March 2006 and the successful completion of the negotiations for a new staff-monitored programme for 2006 have encouraged the Group to hope that there will now be a rapid disbursement of pending budgetary support from the European Union and the World Bank, particularly in view of the positive overall assessment by the IMF mission. The mission concluded that Guinea-Bissau has taken important steps towards addressing the major political and economic problems of recent years.

26. The Group welcomes the decision of UNDP to extend the Emergency Economic Management Fund through the end of 2006. This extension, which was strongly encouraged by the Group, allows the monitoring of new emergency budget support, including those which the Fund has already received following its extension. So far, the Fund has received €193,000 from the Government of Italy and €617,000 from the Government of Brazil. These timely contributions, will, as in the previous two years, serve to provide budget support to cover priority expenditures in the social sectors. The Group would like to encourage other donors to contribute to the Emergency Economic Management Fund as a way to assist the Government to meet its emergency needs.

27. The Group believes that, in addition to traditional sources of financing, other sources could be tapped to support the development efforts of the country such as the agricultural and livestock project currently being supported by the India, Brazil, South Africa initiative. In this connection, the Group is pleased to learn that Guinea-Bissau is among 40 countries that have created the "Leading Group on Solidarity Levies" to fund development projects, an outcome of the recent activities related to the innovative financing for development. The Group urges the countries involved to consider Guinea-Bissau as a potential recipient of these innovative mechanisms.

28. The Council may recall that in its last report the Group reported on an effort of the United Nations country team to add a transition strategy to its current intervention in the country, focusing on economic and social quick-impact initiatives as part of a broader peacebuilding strategy being designed. The Group is disappointed to learn that, despite its efforts, the country team was unable to secure any funding for this worthwhile project. The Group would like to encourage the partners of Guinea-Bissau to consider supporting this approach with a view to concentrating the quick impact initiatives in the northern areas.

29. The Group is pleased to report that preparations for the donor round-table conference have resumed following the approval of the Government's programme by Parliament in March 2006. The new Government has developed a plan of action towards the preparation and holding of a round table in November 2006, including: the holding of a workshop in April 2006 to review all the documents to be submitted to the round table; the transmission of the poverty reduction strategy paper to the World Bank and IMF for a joint assessment and subsequent approval by their Boards; and sensitization missions in September and October. UNDP is working closely with the Government in regard to the round table and is providing critical support for the different steps envisaged.

30. The Group also welcomes the recent decision by the European Union, one of Guinea-Bissau's key traditional partners, to increase its assistance for the 2002-2007 national indicative programme by €10.7 million. Of this additional amount, €5 million for budgetary support in 2006 and €5.7 million will be disbursed for security sector reform.

31. The Council may recall that in its previous reports, the Group stressed the importance of security sector reform for stability of the country including renewed investment and longer-term development assistance. The Group is pleased that there is measurable progress in this area. An inter-ministerial commission of defence and security has been established to oversee the implementation of the reforms supported by a monitoring group composed of UNDP, UNOGBIS together with the European Union, the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries and ECOWAS. In addition, the problem of small arms and light weapons is also being addressed by the United Nations country team in collaboration with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and a project managed by the Department for Economic and Social Affairs.

V. Medium to long-term perspective for Guinea-Bissau

32. Guinea-Bissau lives a "structural emergency", with a State budget that is highly dependent on international donor community for 80 per cent of its resources. The inability of the country to receive a predictable and adequate amount of resources to ensure the delivery of basic services and to ensure the minimum functioning of the State will continue to contribute to the sense of uncertainty and insecurity. This uncertainty in financing undermines the ability of the Government to implement its economic reform programme, continuing the vicious circle of low performance and declining donor assistance.

33. For this reason, the Group is anxious to see the completion of the donor round-table conference, which had been planned even before the Group's establishment and which has been repeatedly postponed for a variety of reasons. The round table

would aim to raise funds to cover the current budgetary gap as well as projects that would help to implement the country's poverty reduction plan. The Government of Guinea-Bissau estimates that $427.7 million will be needed to implement the plan, of which only 12 per cent has been secured. In this connection, the Group urges strong participation by old and new partners of Guinea-Bissau in the donor round-table conference now scheduled for November 2006.

34. The Group is also of the view that for the medium to long term, actions will have to be undertaken to address the country's debt service problems. Guinea-Bissau continues to accumulate both internal and external debt service arrears to most creditors and is one of the most indebted poor countries under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative. The country's debt burden is almost four times its national income (389.9 per cent) and amounts to over $1 billion and is owed mostly to other countries (57.4 per cent) of which 70 per cent is to the members of the Paris Club. Thus, even with its possible treatment under the Debt Initiative, Guinea-Bissau's debt would continue to be unsustainable. In any event, with the suspension of most interim debt relief after 2001, most external debt has fallen into arrears. The country is not likely to reach the completion point under the Debt Initiative, or to benefit from the multilateral debt relief initiative of the Group of Eight until end of 2009 at the earliest.

35. To help the country on a short-term basis, the Group would like urge the international donor community and other interested partners, including subregional economic and financial organizations in West Africa, to consider short-term options to help address the problems of arrears to all multilateral financial institutions. On a longer term basis, the Group would like to urge that Guinea-Bissau, along with other countries emerging from conflict and benefiting from the Heavily Indebted poor Countries Debt Initiative, be considered for fast-tracking of debt relief under the Group of Eight multilateral debt relief initiative.

36. To put Guinea-Bissau on a path of internally driven sustainable development, the Group continues to emphasize the urgent need for the Government of Guinea-Bissau, with the help of the international community, to put in place a comprehensive economic diversification strategy. As noted in previous reports of the Group, the country has enormous potential in timber, fisheries, husbandry and agriculture, which could easily satisfy internal demand. The subsoil is rich in bauxite and phosphate, with a potential for diamond and gold mining and off-shore oil exploration. The main source of income is currently derived from cashew nut exports and the licensing of fishing rights.

37. The Group notes that Guinea-Bissau may be close to fulfilling the criteria for assessing pilot candidates for the integrated framework for trade-related capacity-building,[4] which includes integrating trade in the national development strategy through its poverty reduction strategy paper; a World Bank Consultative Group or

[4] The Framework, inaugurated in October 1997 by six multilateral institutions (IMF, the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, UNDP, World Bank and WTO) at the World Trade Organization high-level meeting on integrated initiatives for least developed countries' trade development, has twin objectives of mainstreaming trade into the national development plans such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers as well as assisting in the coordinated delivery of trade-related technical assistance in response to individual needs of countries. The integrated framework now covers 30 countries but does not include Guinea-Bissau.

UNDP round-table conference; and a conducive operational country environment (for example, improvement in the level of infrastructure, the level of donor engagement and the pace of domestic reform). Clearly Guinea-Bissau, with the completion of its round-table conference could be ready to request joining the other least developed countries as a pilot country although much work would be needed to build up its physical infrastructure, in particular roads, ports and energy supply. The Group believes that the United Nations system could help Guinea-Bissau begin to prepare for this eventuality by assisting the Government to formulate a comprehensive economic diversification strategy, elements of which could be used for the integrated framework action plan.

38. One of the major challenges facing the Government of Guinea-Bissau over past years has been poor management in its public administration. As the Group has previously noted there has been significant improvement in the management of public funds. The Group is concerned that further progress is hampered by weakness in technical capacity within the public sector and continues to urge the Bretton Woods institutions, the United Nations system and other multilateral organizations to provide technical assistance to the country in strengthening its public administration. The Group understands that such a plan is embedded in the poverty reduction strategy paper and will be addressed by the donor round-table process.

39. The Group is also pleased to report that an active civil society in Guinea-Bissau is beginning to emerge. A number of groups have become involved in promoting dialogue and reconciliation among the various contending parties in the country. This new development is being actively supported by UNOGBIS through the organization of workshops designed to strengthen the capacity of civil society groups to contribute to the consolidation of peace in the country.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

40. **Concerns continue to be expressed by the international community and, in particular, by donors about the political and institutional instability of the country. The Group is similarly concerned by the frequent changes in leadership after short periods of relative stability and progress. This has made it difficult for the donor community to build up confidence in the future of the country. The events of the second half of 2005 and the more recent military action by the Armed Forces of Guinea-Bissau have again led to a period of stagnation in resource mobilization and the erosion of good will.**

41. **While acknowledging the legitimate concern of the donor community, the Group would like to note the underlying good news that since late 2003 that there has been clear overall progress in improving public administration, transparency and accountability in the public sector. In a press release following the conclusions of article IV consultations in March 2006, IMF stated that "the performance of the last 12 months has been encouraging and the outlook is favourable".[5] These words follow the positive assessments of 2004 and 2005[6] noted in the Group's reports. Against this background, the Group is of the view that there is room for flexibility in the provision of budgetary**

[5] IMF, press conference on Guinea-Bissau, 30 March 2006.

[6] E/2004/92, E/2005/8 and E/2005/70.

support to the Government of Guinea-Bissau in the short term and in assisting the country in the longer-term with its poverty reduction plan. This approach would be helpful in demonstrating the dividends of peace and help the country to consolidate its democracy.

42. **The Group continues to be concerned that progress made by Guinea-Bissau could be undermined by the weak level of engagement by the international community. For this reason, the Group invites the Economic and Social Council to consider recommending, upon the request of the Government of Guinea-Bissau, that it be among the first cases to be considered by the Peacebuilding Commission. The Group believes that this focused and coordinated attention from the entire international community is essential to the successful completion of the country's post-conflict transition. In this context, the Group remains available to monitor the situation in the country until the Peacebuilding Commission establishes a country team for Guinea-Bissau if the Council so decides.**